



BITS of POETRY

BY

JESSE H. FERGUSON



THE HOLY NIGHT.

A lone star peeps forth from an azure sky,—
The night was cold and drear and dark;
It's silvery gleams gladdened the shepherd's eye,
And heavenward gazing, he listens. Hark!

A chorus of angels in joyous flight,
Descended from God's throne above;
They shout hosannas in the still, still night,
And bring unto all men God's message of love.

"Glory to God!" the Seraph chorus cries,
And wise men listen to that heavenly refrain;
"Glory to God!" fills the moonless skies,
And a heavenly light illumines all the plain.

The wise men look and behold, the star
Moves in its effulgence towards Bethlehem's street—
"Glory to God!" how sweet the sounds from afar,
In melodious angelic strain their listening ears greet.

"Glory to God!" how wondrously the angels sing!
And guided by the star the wise men seek where he lay;
"For Peace and Goodwill unto all men we bring!"
And the wise men listen'd on the threshold of day.

ENTER THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

Dry O weeping world, thy tears!
Let them cease to flow;
Cease thy lamentations, drown thy fears,
And suffer anguish'd hearts no more.

For out of all the darkness now appears
A glimmering light from above,
Dry O weeping world thy tears,
And rejoice in the bounty of thy Creator's love.

Dry O weeping world, thy tears,
And cease thy mournful songs;
And list the joyful tidings God's holy herald bears,
Of a Redeemer who shall save us from our wrongs.

Dry O weeping world thy tears,
And repent the countenance sad;
Dry O weeping world thy tears;
Let every heart and tongue be glad.

Dry O weeping world thy tears,
And let the sufferings of thy heart decrease;
For Christ, our salvation unto us now appears,
And brings us love and life and peace.

THE SOLDIER'S NIGHTMARE.

When night looks down in lonesome dreariness,
And all the world seems sad and drear;
Then Grim Despair, with burdensome heaviness,
Comes stroding into my tent and seats himself near.

When night looks down, and the rayless inkiness
Spreads like Death's shroud o'er all the earth;
I see all million spectres dancing out in the dark abyss,
In ghoulish revel and fantasy and maddened mirth.

There stands the breathless wraith of days forgotten now and past,
Its features gaunt and all dishevelled its flowing hair;
It seems to wish to speak, but its tongue is still and holden fast;
And with prayerful eyes it stands motionless there.

"Who art thou?" I shout in wretched voice that quakes with fear,
And in frenzy I grasp my trusty burnished sword;
But untimid, the ghost with prayerful eyes draws nearer, near,
And affrighted I shriek, "Who art thou—Satan, devil or lord?"

"Fair child be calm," the spectral ghost blandly replies,
And gently laid its hand upon my fevered brow.—
Ah, there was anguish and sorrow writ in those gleaming spectral
eyes;
Even bitter anguish knit the fair phantasmal brow.

"From carnal world I come not, nor realm that bliss of love must
know;
But from the torturing abyss of Despair,
Where I am doomed to roam mid Tartarean flames that seethe and
roar,
That render lethal dark Hades' dismal air."

"For when in the flesh, I sought to do no man good;
I knew not love nor courted sacrifice.
When patriots hastening besought me, a self-lover stubborn I
stood—
All gained for self I fell short of Paradise."

"With what gladsome heart wouldst I go, my duty to God and man
to do,
If I were carnal—if I were not of flesh bereft;
Fain wouldst I live again, Life's great precepts of pursue,
Since now I know that Life is not to live and labor alone for self.

"Life was not given to spend our days our own pleasures to devise,
Whilst our fellowman dwells in want and misery;
But that life is real that abounds in deeds of love and sacrifice,
When each one struggles for his brother's liberty."

"How great that life that seeks and feeds the hungry soul!
That seeks the forlorn one and bids his sorrowing cease.
How rich that life which binds the wounded and makes the shat-
tered whole!
That struggles towards God and His Eternal Peace!"

"Go thou—" and the spectral form vanished from my intensive
gaze,
Then I awoke from out my haunting dreams;
There all gory the field lay 'neath the sun's first morning rays,
And far down the hillside the foeman's campfire brightly gleams.

UNCLE NED'S STORY.

Der rahcoon an' der 'possum gottah fightin' one day.
Sez de 'possum to de rahcoon: "B'liev whut I say;
Yo' sho' don' 'f'd to dem farmahs ovah dar—
'Twant me dat stole dem chickens, fer 'twuz ole bruddah b'ar."

An' now, ob co'se lee anghy, caus' 'twant no use ter li,
An' ef yo' don' lik' whut I say, jes' let yo' meat-trap fly.
An' 'clar' fur goodness gennemen, ah'll maul yo' so doggon' hard
Dat hit'll scar de farmah's chickens away up yondah in de ba'nyad.

Why, sur, lee be'n tekin' yo'r sass fer nigh onto er ye'r;
But I 'clar' 'fo' all de peepul dat I wan' gwine tek dis hyear.
N' ef yo' don' lik' whut I say, jes' let yo'r meat-trap fly,
An' ah'll smash de durned ole moufe dat don' tole er gr'at big li."



MR. JESSE H. FERGUSON.

Our young Poet-Author, who, under the unselfish encouragement of Mr. J. B. Boyd and Mr. Louis K. Thomas, especially, has developed a rare literary talent. He is also one of the four linotype operators at the great N. B. P. B., and is Assist. to the Editorial Secretary of this Institution.

Sed de rahcoon to de 'possum ez he kindah got up c'los,
"Ef yo' don' lik' mah sp'akin' yo' kin jes' poke out yo'r nose;
An' la' ef ah don' conwine' yo', twont be no use ter try it den,
Fer de way ah'll smash yo'r nose sur, to tell 'twould be er sin.

An—yes, I sey yo' stol' dat chicken, an' I only tol' de trufe,
Caus' I seed yo' wiff mah eyes er comin' down offen de rufe;
An' yo' bed'im in yo'r moufe—don' yo' dare 'ny dat to me!
Fer de daun-wuz fas' 'proachin', an' 'twuz er plenty light ter see.

An' I spects 'twould be all de bettah ef yo'd only shet yo'r moufe,
Caus' I ain't got no time fer argin' long, fer I kno' Ise tol' de trufe.
An' ef dat don' suit yo', dere's 'cepshun ter de rule;
We kin fight it out right hyear—whut yo' say to dat eh, fool?"

Den all at wunc' de 'possum jes' riz right up an' jumped
Right onto de rahcoon—right on his haid, kerblump.
Den dar wuz er ferece kermotion—ha'r a-dyin' eberywhar—
Purst, ah hurd som' cusswo'ds, den ah hurd some'one say "Har."

'Reckly all de dust wuz settled an' de war-clouds rolled erway;
An' I 'clar' I almos' fainted, fer dar dat big fat 'possum lay.
Der rahcoon don' got his mutton, dat wuz proven b'yon' er doubt;
Caus' dem rahcoons neber argur les' dey kno's whut dey's argurin'
'bout.

Yes, I pick'd up dat 'possum; turn'd ter t'ank de rahcoon, too!
Sez I, Mistah rahcoon, yo's a genneman, caus' yo' fotched me dis
fine stew.

Den erway hom' I scurried, kindah felt full ob shame,
Caus' ah pick'd up er wound'd 'possum; but sez I, "O well, dad
blame!"

REMINISCENCE.

(Dedicated to the Memory of Miss M. E. Starnes.)

'Twas a quaint and sequestered village
All clothed in Nature's solitude
By the hills, and trees that stately
On their rugged bosoms stood.

Upon the hillside was a churchyard—
A remote and time-honored mausoleum,
Where the nightingale sang sadly
The somnolent souls' requiem.

The church stood behind the cedars,
In sanctious silence toward the sky upreared;
Within whose portals saints on the Sabbath
Worshipped the God they feared.

White against the sky, and far down the hill slope,
Mute, clothed in ivy and standing all alone
Was the lowly and thatched-roof cottage
Where my sweet Marie was born.

Higher up, and away to the northward,
And commanding a view of the yellow road,
In humble possession my sire
Had his hewn-log abode.

Picturesque was the village at morning,
At dawn ere the sun from his bed arose—
The gay chanticleer in clarion shrill, awoke us
From our night's repose.

Soon smoke, spiralling from many a rude chimney,
Bespoke a warm breakfast feast;
And went sailing skyward,
Far out into the bright blue East.

Then down into the emerald valley,
Without music or gladsome song,
Went forth sheep herds, kine and fowls,
A happy, barnyard throng.

Went forth the workmen to the fields of harvest,
In promiscuous and jocund throng;
Laughing or singing merrily
Some familiar and soulful song.

And their voices filled the morning air
With rhythm and sweet melodies;
And set the woods a-ringing
With whispering, tuneful trees.

Like the sweet odor of summer flowers,
Which is remembered when long their blooms are gone,
When fond recollection brings it back
To enlighten the heart forlorn:

So is the music to the dame of the harvester,
As she listens to the echoes dying far away;
It takes her back thru the long years
To a sweeter and a youthful day.

Quietly she turns herself within doors,
With yearning heart, 'midst half stifled sighs;
And random tears now glisten
In her bright and wistful eyes.

All glorious was the village at evening,
As slowly sank the rutilant sun
Down into the Western sky to rest him
Of his daily labors done.

There was noise in the village at evening—
The shouting children returned from school,
Leading captive poor weeping Harry,
The mischief and teacher's fool.

The workmen returned from the fields of harvest
In noisy and jocund throng;
Joking or singing merrily
The villagers' evening song:

"Farewell, O mighty hero!
Farewell, O Evening Sun;
Farewell, labor's loved bridegroom,
I'll meet you at the dawn."

Returning from over the clovered meadows,
Came the sweet-breathed sheep, a fleecy horde
While chanticleer and his barem flock
Returned to their boughed abode.

Came back the cattle, the swine and horses,
All anointed with nature's sweet incense;
They stood in patience before the bars
Of the old barnyard fence.

Then, when our evening's labor was ended,
Ere twilight's ghostly shadows fell,
Happy and alone my Marie and I
Wandered down into the tranquil dell.

Then we ascended up, upon the hillside,
To watch the sinking sun far away;
And the shimmering, limpid Harpeith
Gliding placid, on its way.

We gazed down upon its pellucid bosom,
Which gleamed silver 'neath the vesper breeze;
In the gloaming; and shadowed
By the palanxed, whispering trees.

Ah, sweet were those days in the village,
When Marie and I were young;
When life was sweetened by pure souls,
Chaste and ungulled tongue.

Oh, I remember how oft she stood waiting
By the house lot gate at eventide,
Ere the last cloud-rose of the heavens
Had bloomed and faded and died.

There she stood with her hand upon the palling;
Upon her face a sweet cheery smile—
Standing there in God's great open,
Mother Nature's obedient child.

Behind her the trees were whispering;
The grasses grew luxuriant beneath her feet;
And above rang the music of the wild choir
In cadent harmonies sweet.

There was none fairer than my Marie,
She of bright eyes and raven hair—
Methought so often, how kind the angels
Who left those heav'nly glories there!

By the quaint old sty! I'd met her,
Just at the evening's close,
When aglow sinks the golden sun
Silent down to repose.

There with children's hearts we chatted;
Our voices filled all the breeze,
And our laughter rang shrill,
Reverberant in all the trees.